

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11
ACDA-12 TRSE-00 /078 W
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R 211840Z AUG 78
FM AMEMBASSY BONN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1229
INFO AMEMBASSY BERLIN
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMCONSUL BREMEN
AMCONSUL DUSSELDORF
AMCONSUL FRANKFURT
AMCONSUL HAMBURG
AMCONSUL MUNICH
AMCONSUL STUTTGART
USMISSION USBERLIN

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BONN 15180

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, GW
SUBJECT: THE POLITICAL FUTURE OF WALTER SCHEEL

REFERENCE: BONN 14295

BEGIN SUMMARY: AN FDP BUNDESTAG DEPUTY HAS RAISED A
MINOR POLITICAL RUCKUS BY PUBLICLY URGING THAT WALTER
SCHEEL RETURN TO PARTISAN POLITICS IF HIS TENURE AS
PRESIDENT ENDS NEXT MAY. BOTH THE FDP AND SCHEEL HAVE
REJECTED THIS IDEA, ALBEIT FOR DIFFERENT REASONS. GIVEN
THE FDP'S INTERNAL PREDICAMENT AND THE CDU/CSU'S ABSOLUTE
LOCK ON THE FEDERAL ASSEMBLY, IT IS LIKELY THAT THIS
DISCUSSION WILL CONTINUE IN THE NINE MONTHS BETWEEN NOW
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AND THE NEXT PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. END SUMMARY.

1. IN A RECENT INTERVIEW WITH DER SPIEGEL, FDP
BUNDESTAG DEPUTY JUERGEN MOELLEMANN URGED THAT WALTER
SCHEEL RETURN TO ACTIVE FDP POLITICS IF HIS TENURE AS
FEDERAL PRESIDENT ENDS NEXT MAY. MOELLEMANN CLAIMED
THAT MANY FDP LEADERS AND THE ELECTORATE SHARE HIS

VIEW THAT SCHEEL COULD REVIVE THE BATTERED FDP BY GIVING A FORM OF "MORAL REARMAMENT" TO ITS TROOPS. HE SPECIFICALLY DENIED THAT, IN SUCH A ROLE, SCHEEL WOULD CONFLICT WITH FDP NATIONAL CHAIRMAN HANS-DIETRICH GENSCHER.

2. THESE MUSINGS LED TO A FLURRY OF PUBLIC COMMENT, MOSTLY CRITICAL. FDP HEADQUARTERS CRITICIZED MOELLEMANN'S VIEWS AS "POINTLESS" AND DETRIMENTAL TO THE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT. CDU/CSU CIRCLES DRUBBED HIM IN A SIMILAR VEIN. THE PRESIDENTIAL OFFICE POURED COLD WATER ON THE NOTION THAT SCHEEL, AFTER LEAVING OFFICE, MIGHT DESCEND AGAIN INTO THE PARTISAN ARENA. IN A LATER INTERVIEW ON AUGUST 20, SCHEEL PERSONALLY RULED OUT A RETURN TO PARTISANSHIP BUT CAREFULLY NOTED HIS DESIRE TO STAY ACTIVE POLITICALLY BY SERVING THE FRG AS AN "ELDER STATESMAN" IN DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS.

3. GIVEN THE CIRCUMSTANCES, SCHEEL COULD HARDLY HAVE SAID LESS. HE WOULD VERY MUCH LIKE A SECOND TERM, BUT HE KNOWS THAT THE ODDS FOR HIS REELECTION ARE SLIM, GIVEN THE CDU/CSU'S ABSOLUTE CONTROL OF VOTES IN THE FEDERAL ASSEMBLY THAT WILL MEET TO ELECT THE PRESIDENT NEXT MAY. SCHEEL HAS WON MUCH MORAL AND POLITICAL AUTHORITY SINCE BECOMING PRESIDENT IN MAY 1974, AND HE HAS NO DESIRE TO

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PREJUDICE HIS FUTURE OPTIONS BY ENTERING A USELESS PUBLIC DEBATE AT THIS TIME.

4. MAKING ALLOWANCES FOR THE FACTS THAT AUGUST IS A SLOW NEWS MONTH AND THAT MOELLEMANN TENDS TO HEADLINE-GRABBING, THE REVIVED TALK OF SCHEEL'S FUTURE HAS REAL POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE. IT INDICATES A GENERAL FERMENT GOING ON WITHIN THE FDP, STILL SEEKING TO HEAL ITS WOUNDS FROM THE JUNE 4 ELECTIONS IN HAMBURG AND LOWER SAXONY. WE HAVE GOOD REASON TO BELIEVE THAT MANY FDP MEMBERS ARE PRIVATELY SPECULATING ON HOW SCHEEL MIGHT BE PERSUADED TO SERVE HIS PARTY AGAIN. THEY REGARD GENSCHER'S POSITION AND HEALTH AS VULNERABLE, BUT THEY SEE NO CLEAR SUCCESSOR ON THE FIRST TEAM. INDICATIVE OF THE PARTY'S DILEMMA, INTERIOR MINISTER BAUM RECENTLY ASSERTED IN AN INTERVIEW THAT THERE IS NO ALTERNATIVE TO GENSCHER BUT THAT THE FDP MUST DEFINITELY REGENERATE ITSELF.

5. INEVITABLY, POLITICAL POKER PLAYS A ROLE IN THE SELECTION OF AN FRG PRESIDENT, REGARDLESS OF HOW OFTEN ALL PARTIES DENY THE POINT.

A. LAST APRIL, SPD NATIONAL CHAIRMAN WILLY BRANDT RAISED
A SIMILAR BOUT OF CONTROVERSY OVER SCHEEL BY URGING THAT
ALL PARTIES UNITE TO SUPPORT A SECOND TERM FOR HIM. THAT

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 BONN 15180

EFFORT RAN INTO STIFF CDU/CSU OPPOSITION AND WAS QUICKLY
FORGOTTEN. AT THE TIME, IT WAS PERCEIVED AS AN SPD PLOY
TO HEAD OFF FDP THOUGHTS OF SWITCHING COALITION PARTNERS.

B. SOMEWHAT LATER, CSU BUNDESTAG DEPUTY FRIEDRICH
ZIMMERMANN MUSED THAT THE UNION MIGHT SUPPORT SCHEEL'S
DESIRE FOR A SECOND TERM IF THE "CONSTELLATION WERE
RIGHT" -- I.E., IF THE FDP SWITCHED ITS ALLEGIANCE TO
THE UNION BEFOREHAND. LIKE BRANDT, ZIMMERMANN REAPED A
LOT OF CRITICISM FOR HIS REMARK.

6. FRG HISTORY OFFERS FEW PRECEDENTS ON HOW FORMER
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PRESIDENTS SHOULD BEHAVE. NONE OF SCHEEL'S THREE
PREDECESSORS -- THEODOR HEUSS (FDP), HEINRICH LUEBKE
(CDU), AND GUSTAV HEINEMANN (SPD), -- RETURNED TO
ACTIVE POLITICS AFTER LEAVING OFFICE, USUALLY FOR
COMPELLING PERSONAL REASONS. HEALTH AND AGE (75)
PERSUADED HEINEMANN NOT TO SEEK A SECOND TERM, IN
CONTRAST TO HEUSS AND LUEBKE. HOWEVER, SCHEEL WILL
BE ONLY 60 AND PRESUMABLY IN GOOD HEALTH WHEN THE
FEDERAL ASSEMBLY MEETS NEXT MAY. IF HE IS NOT
REELECTED -- AND THE ODDS POINT HEAVILY IN THAT
DIRECTION -- HE MAY WELL SEEK TO REMAIN SOMEWHERE ON
THE FRG'S POLITICAL STAGE. SCHEEL'S HEALTH PROBLEMS
(KIDNEY STONES) IN RECENT YEARS WOULD PROBABLY NOT
RULE OUT A ROLE AS ELDER STATESMAN. HOWEVER, AS
MOELLEMANN'S REMARK INDICATES, SOME PARTS OF THE FDP
MAY THEN HAVE MORE AMBITIOUS PLANS FOR SCHEEL.
GIVEN THE VARIABLES NOW IN THE FDP EQUATION, THAT
PROSPECT CANNOT BE EXCLUDED.
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